

# ***2000 Session Review – "Year of the Patient"***

## ***The Van Luven Report***



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## ***House of Representatives***

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***Toll-free legislative hotline  
1-800-562-6000***

Dear Friends,

The scheduled 60-day regular session ended March 9. The governor immediately called the Legislature into special session because it was still wrangling with funding issues surrounding the state operating, capital and transportation budgets.

Although the budgets were still undecided at the time this was written, state law does not allow me to wait until the special session is finished to mail a newsletter during an election year. Instead, I am permitted one post-session newsletter which must be produced and mailed no later than May 8. To stay within that deadline, I wanted to provide information about legislation passed during the regular session — specifically health care issues.

This could truly be called "The Year of the Patient" because of many remarkable legislative achievements this session for patients and improvements to health care access. We passed a "Patients' Bill of Rights" and legislation to provide individuals access to health insurance. Another bill gives women direct access to midwives, in the same manner as they are allowed to see other women's health specialists. We've opened access to complaint information about hospitals so that patients can feel comfortable about the care they are to receive before they are admitted. In addition, we've adopted legislation requiring prescriptions to be legible so that fewer mistakes are made at the pharmacy.

Other issues I fought for this year include: additional education funding, traffic congestion relief, increased safety on oil and gas pipelines in Washington state, tax cuts — including additional property tax relief for all homeowners, and more. However, space is limited in this newsletter to tell you more about those issues. Should you want more information on those topics or anything in this newsletter, please feel free to call my office.

It is an honor and a privilege to serve as your representative in the state Capitol.

Sincerely,

A blue ink signature of Steve Van Luven, written in a cursive style.

Rep. Steve Van Luven



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### Providing access to health insurance

I share your concerns about the difficulty of obtaining health insurance. It's very distressing to me that individual health insurance is only available

in seven of Washington's 39 counties. Currently, it is not available in King County. Excessive government regulations have forced many insurance companies to discontinue offering this important service.

Who buys individual insurance? Retirees who are not yet eligible for Medicare; self-employed individuals; employees of small businesses that don't offer group coverage; spouses of those whose employers offer coverage for workers but not their families; and people between jobs.

Some think government-run socialized medicine is the answer, such as Canada where health care is "free." But I have relatives in Canada who have reminded me about what Canadians say about that "free" health care – "More people die waiting in line to see their doctors than under the knife of a surgeon." That "free" health care comes with a price of high taxes, long waiting lines, and government deciding what medical care you receive and which doctor you may see.

We went down that road in 1993 when the Legislature passed universal health care which was



repealed in 1995. Instead of experimenting on socialized medicine, **I believe the best way to access affordable, quality health care is by creating a competitive private marketplace.** I supported legislation during the recent legislative session which is aimed at increasing access to health insurance for individuals.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Nearly 600,000 people in Washington state need individual health insurance but cannot obtain it because it hasn't been available in 32 counties. **If you're among those who cannot obtain health insurance, a medical crisis in your family could be financially devastating.**

The new rules provide for a pre-existing condition waiting period of no more than nine months. Prenatal care would not be subject to any waiting period. The bill also guarantees access to health insurance. No one can be denied. Those who are most ill who are needing insurance may access it through the state's high-risk pool. People would also be able to move between plans. Renewability of an existing policy is guaranteed, and prescription and maternity benefits are required to be offered in all individual plans.

Through this legislation, Washington's citizens will again have access to affordable insurance through the private market.

### Write that prescription **LEGIBLY**

Have you ever received a written prescription from a doctor and you couldn't read the handwriting? Ever

wondered if pharmacists have the same trouble reading prescriptions?

More than 100,000 deaths annually nationwide are attributed to medical mistakes. More than 25 percent of medical errors result from mistakes in writing and reading prescriptions. If pharmacists can't correctly read the written prescription, they may fill the order with the wrong medication or the wrong dosage. That's a prescription for disaster.

I agreed as did the Legislature that this is just common sense. Write the prescription legibly so that it can be read and filled correctly. We passed the bill and it is now law.



#### HAVING A PROBLEM WITH A HOSPITAL?

Call the Department of Health Hospital Complaint Hotline at: 1-888-633-6828.



## ***Hospital disclosure law provides for a better informed public***

I think you should know if a hospital makes a mistake -- especially if it is one that has led to permanent injury or death. That is why I supported legislation requiring hospitals to report their mistakes. The bill, which was signed into law, gives people the right to access information on hospital inspections, investigation results and complaints.

If you are about to enter a hospital, this legislation now allows you to check out its performance prior to admission. It will allow you access to information about complaints, complaint investigations and resolutions, and licensing inspections.

Previously, if someone filed a complaint against a hospital, they would have no way of finding out the results of that investigation. But under this new law, the Department of Health will be able to tell a complainant about other similar complaints filed against the hospital, and release the results of the investigation three days after it is complete.

The measure also requires hospitals to post the phone number of the state's Hospital Complaint Hotline so that the public will know whom to call if they have a complaint.

## ***Legislation puts you back in charge of your health care decisions***

When it comes to something as personal as your own health care, insurance companies, accountants or auditors have no business telling you which doctor to use or what operation or drugs you need. That should be a decision between you and your doctor.

Until this year, patients who have been denied benefits by their insurance companies have had few options. In some cases, an insurance company's decision may determine whether someone will live or die. That is WRONG, and that is why I worked on your behalf for a "Patients' Bill of Rights." The measure provides patients the right of recourse when health decisions made by bureaucrats are not in the patient's best interest. Among those rights:

- A fast and impartial grievance process to resolve health care disputes.
- A timely external and independent medical review of health care disputes.
- The right to get up-front information about health care plans.

- A health plan medical director who is a licensed doctor.
- Protection from unnecessary invasions of health care privacy.
- The right to sue managed care plans if patients believe their managed care system has harmed them through negligence.



### ***DID YOU KNOW?***

Washington is the fourth state in the nation to enact a Patients' Bill of Rights. The others are Georgia, California and Texas.

**Speaking on the floor of the House, Rep. Steve Van Luven fights for the rights of patients to have better access to affordable health care.**



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### ***Providing access to midwife services***

Patients will now be given direct access to midwives, the same way they're allowed to see other women's health specialists, thanks to legislation passed this year in the Washington State Legislature.

Health insurance carriers have been required by law to provide their enrollees with direct access to health practitioners, including physicians and osteopathic physicians and their assistants, and advanced registered nurse practitioner specialists. However, they have not previously been required to provide direct access to midwives. I voted to change that with a bill that gives women the choice to this important access.

#### ***DID YOU KNOW?***

In 1997, certified nurse midwives attended the births of 5,562 babies in Washington state. This accounts for 7.21 percent of the births in our state for that year.

### ***Minors may now donate bone marrow***

Many more lives could be saved as a result of a new law which allows minors to donate bone marrow.

The issue was raised by 16-year-old Alden Tucker, 16, of Lacey's North Thurston High School who wanted to help Michael Peñon, a boy suffering from leukemia. Because Tucker is a minor, he was refused testing to see if his bone marrow matched.

Through private efforts, testing was finally performed and Tucker learned he was not a match. Unfortunately, Peñon ultimately died of complications of leukemia.

We need more heroes like Alden Tucker. That's why I supported legislation which allows minors to donate bone marrow.

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